

Message Text

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ACTION SIL-01

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY MEXICO
USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY
USMISSION BRUSSELS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 1602

DEPT FOR ARA LABOR ADVISOR JOHN O'GRADY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, ICFTU, AR, SHUM
SUBJECT: SPECIAL ICFTU MISSION TO ARGENTINA: PART TWO

REF: USMISSION EC BRUSSELS 01355

1) WE FOUND KERSTEN TO BE EXTREMELY SKILLFUL, WELL INFORMED AND POLITICALLY ASTUTE. FOR EXAMPLE, HE TOLD PORCILLE THAT THE MISSION WAS IN ARGENTINA BECAUSE IT DID NOT WISH TO LEAVE THE FIELD ALONE TO "THOSE WHO CALL THEMSELVES CHRISTIANS" AND TO THE COMMUNISTS. IN MEETINGS WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HE STRESSED THE FACT THAT, AS A SOCIAL DEMOCRAT, HE HAD SPENT THREE YEARS AS A PRISONER IN A SOVIET LABOR CAMP, THUS IMPRESSING GOA OFFICIALS WITH HIS ANTI-COMMUNIST CREDENTIALS. THIS HELPED TO GIVE SUBSTANCE TO HIS POSITION THAT ICFTU HAD NO DOUBLE STANDARD IN ITS CONDEMNATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND RESTRICTIONS OF TRADE UNION LIBERTIES "WHETHER BY FASCIST GOVERNMENTS SUCH AS CHILE OR BY COMMUNIST GOVERNMENTS SUCH AS CZECHOSLOVAKIA OR THE SOVIET UNION."
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ETCHEVERRY ALSO DID A VERY GOOD JOB WINNING THE FRIENDSHIP OF LOCAL LEADERS WHO ORDINARILY TAKE SATISFACTION IN DENIGRATING HIM AS AN INSIGNIFICANT ERRAND BOY. (HE HAS A DRAMATIC STORY TO TELL ABOUT HIS VISIT TO THE JAILHOUSE). FOR THREE DAYS, THE ICFTU AND ORIT HAD THE ARGENTINE LABOR MOVEMENT MESMERIZED. FOR ANY-ONE WHO KNOWS THE HISTORY OF CGT-ORIT RELATIONS, THE MISSION'S RECEPTION HERE WAS NOTHING LESS THAN INCREDIBLE. IN TERMS OF

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARGENTINA'S INTERNATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS,
THIS VISIT WAS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE AND VALUE.

2) UNFORTUNATELY, THE VISIT WAS NOT WITHOUT SOME NEGATIVE REPERCUSSIONS. KERSTEN SEEMED TO RECOGNIZE THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE ARGENTINE LABOR LEADERS WHEN HE DESCRIBED THE RESULTS AS BEING FAR BETTER THAN ANYONE IN GENEVA IMAGINED POSSIBLE ALTHOUGH NOT AS GREAT AS HE WOULD HAVE LIKED. KERSTEN ARRIVED IN THE COUNTRY LIKE A FIERCE TIGER AND GAVE THE APPEARANCE OF LEAVING LIKE A LAMB. ON HIS ARRIVAL HE CATEGORIZED ARGENTINA AS BEING IN VIOLATION OF ITS ILO COMMITMENTS AND CLEARLY IMPLIED THAT, UNLESS THIS WERE REVERSED, HE PLANNED TO GIVE A NEGATIVE REPORT TO THE ENTREPRENEURS GROUP OF THE ILO GOVERNING BODY ON FEBRUARY 26-- WITH ALL THE IMPLICATIONS THIS MIGHT HAVE ON ARGENTINE INVESTMENT PROSPECTS, ETCETERA. UNDOUBTEDLY, HE WAS IMPRESSED DURING HIS VISIT BY THE NUANCES WHICH DISTINGUISH THE ARGENTINE MILITARY GOVERNMENT FROM PINOCHET AND STROESNER, INCLUDING A RELATIVELY FREE PRESS, VIDELA'S EXPRESSION OF HOPE FOR CIVIL GOVERNMENT AND THE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND COURTESIES ACCORDED TO THE MISSION. TO SOME DEGREE, THE GENUINE GAINS ACHIEVED DURING THE VISIT WERE DISSIPATED AT THE END BECAUSE OF THE DISCREET POSTURE KERSTEN ADOPTED ON DEPARTING THE COUNTRY. (IN ESSENCE, HE SAID HE WAS SATISFIED WITH THE STATEMENTS ELICITED FROM GOA OFFICIALS, BUT HE COULD NOT REVEAL THE DETAILS -- PRESUMABLY FOR FEAR OF UP-SETTING THE COMMITMENTS MADE BY THE GOA. AT LEAST, HE SAID IN WHAT WAS INTENDED TO PROVIDE SOME SOLACE TO THE ARGENTINE LABOR LEADERS, A CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED WITH THE GOVERNMENT*)

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3) THERE IS NOTHING THAT EITHER MASSERA OR VIDELA TOLD KERSTEN WHICH THE LABOR LEADERS HERE HAVE NOT HEAR FOR THE PAST YEAR. UNFORTUNATELY, LOCAL UNION LEADERS HAD UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS AS TO WHAT THE MISSION COULD ACHIEVE HERE. LABOR LEADERS HAVE BEEN ANTICIPATING A SCENARIO WHICH WOULD INCLUDE THE PROMULGATION OF THE GUIDELINES FOR THE NEW TRADE UNION LAW ON MARCH 1 AND A BEGINNING OF THE NORMALIZATION PROCESS ON MAY 1. MOREOVER, IT HAD BEEN THOUGHT HERE -- UNREALISTICALLY AGAIN -- THAT IF THE SITUATION WERE NOT NORMALIZED BY JUNE, THE ICFTU WOULD DELCARE WAR ON THE JUNTA AND ALL HELL WOULD BREAK LOOSE IN THE ANNUAL ILO CONFERENCE. KERSTEN'S TRUNCATED REPORT TO A JAM-PACKED SESSION OF LABOR LEADERS AT THE END OF THE VISIT LENT THE APPEARANCE OF SETTING BACK THE SCENARIO ANOTHER SIX MONTHS AND THUS REMOVING THE THREAT OF A FINAL SHOWDOWN IN JUNE. HOW IT WILL WORK OUT REMAINS TO BE SEEN, AS KERSTEN HIMSELF SAID THAT THE ICFTU WOULD REMAIN IN A "CLINCH" WITH THE GOA AND WOULD EXPECT TO HEAR FROM THE LABOR LEADERSHIP AS SOON AS IT APPEARED THAT THE GOVERNMENT

WAS NOT LIVING UP TO ITS PROMISES. THE LABOR MOVEMENT, OF COURSE, DOES NOT APPRECIATE THE DIPLOMATIC REQUIREMENTS OF THE SITUATION NOR THE REAL LIMITS ON THE INFLUENCE WHICH THE ICFTU CAN BRING TO BEAR. MOREOVER, WE DO NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT VIDELA MAY BE ABLE TO KEEP SOME OF THE PROMISES HE REPORTEDLY MADE. AT LEAST -- AND THIS WE THINK IS A SIGNIFICANT GAIN -- THE MISSION WAS ABLE TO ELICIT A STATEMENT OF INTENT FROM THE PRESIDENT. HERETOFORE SUCH COMMITMENTS HAD BEEN MADE ONLY AT LIENDO'S LEVEL. NEVERTHELESS, HWE HAVE TO REPORT A PREVAILING SENSE OF PESSIMISM AMONG THE UNION LEADERS AT THE END OF AN OTHERWISE SUCCESSFUL VISIT. TWENTY LEADERS MEETING AFTERWARDS AGREED THAT THE VISIT WAS POSITIVE ON BALANCE. BUT THEY ARE NOT OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE GOA'S FULFILLING ITS COMMITMENTS. FACED WITH GROWING RANK-AND-FILE UNREST OVER DECLINING REAL WAGES, THE LEADERS SEE THEMSELVES BEING SWEEPED INTO A CONFRONTATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT -- A CONFRONTATION WHICH, THEY FEAR, WILL LEAD TO

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THEIR LOSING CONTROL OF THE UNIONS "TO THE COMMUNISTS." THIS ARGUMENT UNDOUBTEDLY IS AN EXAGGERATED RHETORICAL DEVICE TO SOME EXTENT, BUT WE THINK THERE IS A DANGER THAT THE LEADERS COULD WHIP THEMSELVES INTO A SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY INSOFAR AS A CONFRONTATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT IS CONCERNED. IN THE MEANTIME, THE PRESS HAS TAKEN THE VIEW THAT SOCIAL DEMOCRAT KERSTEN'S DEPARTING REMARKS CONSTITUTE A PUBLIC RELATIONS TRIUMPH FOR THE GOVERNMENT, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC HEADS OF STATE IN EUROPE HAVE BEEN A MAJOR SOURCE OF CRITICISM OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN ARGENTINA.

4) ACTION REQUESTED: SINCE THE VARIOUS MEMBERS OF THE DELEGATION MAY HAVE DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS AS TO WHAT COMMITMENTS WERE MADE DURING VISIT HERE, WE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN RECEIVING FROM ADDRESSEES COPIES OF ANY REPORTS ISSUED BY THE PRINCIPALS INVOLVED. (NOTE THAT KERSTEN INTENDS TO BRIEF IRVING BROWN AND ETCHEVERRY WILL BE IN CONTACT WITH AFL-CIO REPRESENTATIVES IN WASHINGTON.) THE DEGREE TO WHICH GOA LIVES UP TO COMMITMENTS IT WAS THOUGHT TO HAVE MADE DURING THIS VISIT COULD BECOME A SUBJECT OF CONTROVERSY IN THE NEAR FUTURE, AND IT WOULD BE BENEFICIAL IF WE ALL WERE WORKING WITH THE SAME GAME PLAN.

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